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Defense Primer: Intelligence Support to Military Operations

The statutory responsibility for resourcing and coordinating the activities of the Intelligence Community (IC) in support of military activities belongs to two senior executive branch officials:

- The Director of National Intelligence (DNI), who serves as the principal intelligence advisor to the President as commander in chief (and in the President's other constitutional responsibilities), is responsible for national intelligence strategy, and the overall resourcing and coordination of intelligence activities across multiple agencies in support of the military's strategic, operational, and tactical priorities.
- The Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security (USD(I&S), using Under Secretary of War for Intelligence and Security as a "secondary title" under Executive Order (E.O.) 14347, dated September 5, 2025) is the senior-most Department of Defense (DOD), which is "using a secondary Department of War designation," under E.O. 14347) official responsible for managing the resources, capabilities, and activities of DOD intelligence elements. This position is dual-hatted. When acting as the USD(I&S), the incumbent reports directly to the Secretary of Defense (using Secretary of War as a "secondary title" under E.O. 14347) and serves as the Secretary's principal staff assistant on intelligence, counterintelligence, security, and other intelligence-related matters. When acting as Director of Defense Intelligence (DDI), the incumbent reports directly to the DNI and serves as principal advisor on defense intelligence matters.

Many of the 18 statutory intelligence elements, such as the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), directly support the military. Nine of these reside within the Department of Defense providing integrated intelligence support to military strategy, planning, and operations. They include the National Security Agency (NSA), National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA), National Reconnaissance Office (NRO), Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) and the intelligence components of the five military service (along with the Coast Guard intelligence element when operating as part of DOD).

The Intelligence Process for Supporting Military Operations

The IC supports the entire spectrum of DOD missions, from peacetime to combat operations. Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, (or, JP 2-0, the Joint Chiefs of Staff publication that provides definitive guidance on intelligence support to military operations) notes that the intelligence process for supporting joint (i.e., multi-service, integrated) military operations consists of six interrelated categories of intelligence operations, all aimed at providing to

commanders and national-level decisionmakers relevant and timely intelligence. These categories include planning and direction; collection, processing and exploitation; analysis and production; dissemination and integration; and evaluation and feedback.

Intelligence professionals participate in the planning and decisionmaking processes to align intelligence resources with operational objectives. Collection managers ensure collection resources support specific intelligence requirements pertaining to operational objectives. Because the operational environment is dynamic, the intelligence process is iterative: each category or phase of the process is ongoing and complements the other phases for the duration of the military campaign or operation.

Joint Intelligence Roles and Responsibilities

Table 1 summarizes the roles and responsibilities of joint intelligence to assist commanders in deciding which forces to deploy; when, how, and where to deploy them; and how to employ them in a manner that accomplishes a specific mission consistent with the commander's priorities.

Table 1. Roles and Responsibilities of Joint Intelligence

<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Role: To provide information, assessments and estimates in support of a military commander's decisionmaking.• Responsibilities:<ul style="list-style-type: none">• To support the planning of operations: Describe the operational environment; provide estimates pertaining to adversaries; analyze target systems and their vulnerabilities; identify, nominate objectives.• To support the execution of operations: Monitor and provide warnings concerning the operational environment; enable target engagements.• To assess the effectiveness of operations: Perform battle damage assessments; measure changes to adversaries and the operational environment.
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Source: Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, p. I-5.

According to JP 2-0, intelligence should support a commander's planning, execution, and assessment of the impact of military operations. It should, therefore, include a comprehensive analysis, under JP 2-0, of the threat and relevant aspects of the operating environment in assessments enabling the commander to create and exploit opportunities to accomplish friendly force objectives.

In describing the operational environment, JP 2-0 specifies that intelligence should describe the operational environment for the commander, to include the political context; governance; leadership intentions; military capabilities and tactics; communications and critical

infrastructure; economy; terrain; weather; cultural considerations; social stability; and health conditions. JP 2-0 further holds that intelligence should also provide military planners clearly defined, achievable, and measurable objectives that meet the commander's intent. Changes to the threat and the operational environment require intelligence professionals to continuously review their objectives to determine whether they remain relevant.

To counter an adversary's deception efforts, JP 2-0 specifies that intelligence should confirm previous analysis using multiple analytical methods and processes. This may include confirming an adversary's capabilities and vulnerabilities, and the threat an adversary poses to U.S. and allied information systems. Intelligence can also identify objectives to deceive an adversary to complement the commander's operational objectives.

According to JP 2-0, intelligence must also help assess the effectiveness of military operations by objectively assessing their impact on an adversary and other relevant aspects of the operating environment with respect to the commander's intent. This may include conducting surveys of the extent of damage to targets or providing intelligence support to planning for follow-on strikes, deployments of relief forces, or related activities.

Defense Intelligence Organizations

Table 2 lists intelligence organization at the service-, joint-, and national-levels to support military operations.

Table 1. Selected Defense Intelligence Organizations

Service Intelligence Components
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> U.S. Air Force Intelligence, Surveillance, & Reconnaissance (AF/A2) U.S. Army Intelligence (G-2) U.S. Marine Corps Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance Enterprise (MCISR-E) U.S. Naval Intelligence (CNO N2) U.S. Space Force Intelligence (S-2) U.S. Coast Guard Intelligence (CG-2)
Joint Intelligence Elements within DOD
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint Staff Intelligence Directorate (JCS J-2) National Joint Operations and Intelligence Center (NJOIC) Combatant Command Intelligence Directorate (CCJ2) Joint Force Command Intelligence Directorate (JFC J-2) Joint Intelligence Operations Center (JIOC) Joint Intelligence Support Element (JISE)
Combat Support Agencies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defense Intelligence Agency (DIA) National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency (NGA) National Security Agency (NSA)

Source: CRS, adapted from 50 U.S.C. §3003(4), Joint Publication 2-01, *Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations*, pp. xi-xv and II.

Service Intelligence Components

Service intelligence components are designed to provide service-specific intelligence systems, personnel, training, and analytical expertise to optimize military strategy, planning, and operations. This includes responsibility for providing intelligence assessments of the capabilities and intentions of potential adversaries to support long-term defense planning and systems acquisition. Service intelligence elements are also responsible for assigning service intelligence personnel to joint intelligence and combat support agencies that provide strategic, operational, and tactical-level intelligence support to operational forces.

Joint Intelligence Elements

The Joint Staff's National Joint Operations and Intelligence Center (NJOIC), maintains a continuous, all-source, multidiscipline intelligence alert center to provide defense situational awareness, early warning, and crisis management intelligence support. In addition, joint intelligence operations centers (JIOC) under each combatant command are responsible for coordinating the intelligence activities supporting the military activities within their respective theaters of operations.

Combat Support Agencies (CSAs)

Combat Support Agencies with an intelligence function (e.g., DIA and NGA) provide intelligence products and services to support military planning and operations. Products may include current intelligence briefings; analysis of the geopolitical environment; foreign military capability assessments; geospatial products such as imagery; targeting packages; intelligence information reports; signals intelligence; and tactical support from forward-operating bases in a military theater of operations.

Relevant Statutes

Title 10, U.S. Code, Chapter 21—DOD Intelligence Matters
Title 50, U.S. Code, Chapter 44—National Security

CRS Products

CRS In Focus IF10525, *Defense Primer: National and Defense Intelligence*, by Michael E. DeVine
CRS In Focus IF10523, *Defense Primer: Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security*, by Michael E. DeVine
CRS In Focus IF10524, *Defense Primer: Budgeting for National and Defense Intelligence*, by Michael E. DeVine

Other Resources

DOD, Joint Publication 2-0, *Joint Intelligence*, May 26, 2022.
DOD, Joint Publication 2-01, *Joint and National Intelligence Support to Military Operations*, July 5, 2017.

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